

The Fifth Word

by W.R. Inge

The sermon explores the profound meaning of Christ's cry of 'I thirst,' highlighting His physical suffering and spiritual longing for humanity's salvation.

Scripture: Psalm 42:1, Matthew 5:6, John 4:14, John 7:37, John 19:28, Revelation 22:17

Topics: "The Cross", "Divine Love"

Description

W.R. Inge delves into the deep mysteries behind Jesus' cry 'I thirst' on the cross, exploring the physical, spiritual, and relational aspects of His thirst. Jesus' thirst symbolizes His extreme suffering and love, not just for physical water, but for the salvation and redemption of mankind. He longs for souls to be saved and sanctified, desiring to be an everlasting sacrifice for the honor of the Father. Despite His exhaustion, Jesus' thirst for souls and their sanctification remains unquenchable, reflecting His immeasurable love and desire for all to be united with Him.

Transcript

OUR most tender Lord was so worn out and parched by the extreme bitterness of His pain and suffering, and by the great loss of blood, that He cried, "I thirst." A little word, but full of mysteries.

In the first place it may be understood literally. For it is natural for those who are at the point of death to feel thirst, and to desire to drink. But how great was the drouth felt by Him who is the fountain of living water, but who was now worn out and parched by the heat of His ardent love, when he could truly say, "I am poured out like water," and "My strength is dried up like a potsherd." For not only did He shed all His own blood, and pour out moisture by tears, but the very marrow of His bones, and all His heart's blood, were consumed for our sakes by the heat and flame of love. Therefore He said rightly, "I thirst."

But, secondly, the word may be understood spiritually, as if Christ said to all men, "I thirst for your salvation." Hence St Bernard says: "Jesus cried, I thirst, not, I grieve. O Lord, what dost Thou thirst for? For your faith, your joy. I thirst because of the torments of your souls, far more than for My own bodily sufferings. Have pity on yourselves, if not on Me." And again, "O good Jesus, Thou wearest the crown of thorns; Thou art silent about Thy Cross and wounds, yet Thou criest out, I thirst. For what, then, dost Thou thirst? Truly, for the redemption of mankind only, and for the felicity of the human race." This thirst of Christ was a hundred times more keen and intense than His natural thirst. And, besides, He had another sort of thirst--that is to say, a thirst to suffer more, and to prove to us still more clearly His immeasurable love, as if He said to man, "See how I am worn out and exhausted for thy salvation. See how terrible are

the pains and anguish which I endure. The fierce cruelty of man has almost brought Me to nothing; the sinners of earth have drunk out all My blood, and yet I thirst. Not yet is My heart satisfied, nor My desire accomplished, nor the fire of My love quenched. For if it were possible for Me, and according to My Father's will, that I should be crucified again a thousand times for your salvation and conversion, or that I should hang here, in all this pain and anguish, till the day of judgment, I would gladly do it, to prove to you the immeasurable love which I bear you in My heart, and to soften your stony hearts and rouse you to love Me in return. This is why I hang here so thirsty by the fountain of your hearts, that I may watch the pious souls who come hither to draw from the deep well of My Passion. Therefore, the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Give Me to drink a little water out of the pitcher of thy conscience'--the water of devotion, pity, tears, and mutual love--and who shall let down to Me her pitcher, and shall say, 'Drink, my Lord; and for Thy camels also--that is, Thy servants, who carry Thee about daily on their bodies, and who by night and day are held bound fast by Thy yoke, I will draw the water of brotherly love'--that is the maiden whom the Lord hath prepared for the Son of My Lord, even the bride of the Word of God, united to My humanity. And she shall be counted worthy to enter, like a bride with her bridegroom, into the chamber of eternal rest, when the Bridegroom invites her, saying, 'Come, My blessed bride, inherit the Kingdom of My Father. For I was thirsty, and thou gavest Me drink.'

Thirdly, we may apply this word to the Father, as if Christ said to His Father: "Father, I have declared Thy name to mankind; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do; and in Thy service I have spent My whole body as Thine instrument. Behold, I am all worn out and exhausted; and yet I still thirst to do and suffer more for Thine honour. This is why I hang here, extended to the furthest breadth of love, for I long to be an everlasting sacrifice, a sweet savour to Thee, and at the same time an eternal atonement and salvation to mankind."

Thus, too, might this strong Samson have said: "O Lord, Thou hast put into the hand of Thy servant this very great salvation and victory, and yet behold, I die of thirst." As if He would say: Father, I have accomplished Thy gracious will; I have finished the work of man's salvation, as Thou didst demand; and yet I still thirst; for the sins by which Thou art offended are infinite. And so I desire that the love and merits of My Passion, by which Thou wilt be appeased, may be infinite too.

And as I now offer myself as a peace-offering and a living sacrifice for the salvation of all men, so through Me may all men appease Thee, by offering Me to Thee as a peace-offering to Thine eternal glory, in memory of My Passion, and to make good all their shortcomings." O how acceptable to the Father must this desire of love have been! For what was this thirst but a sweet and pleasant refreshment to the Father, and at the same time the blessed renovation of mankind? Or what other language does this burning throat speak to us, save that of Christ's burning love, without measure and without limit, out of which He did all His works?

This truly is the most noble sacrifice of our redemption, this is that peace-offering which will be offered even to the last day, by all good men, to the Holy Ghost, to the highest Father, in memory of the Son, to the eternal glory of the adorable Trinity, and to the fruit of salvation for mankind. Here, certainly, is the inexhaustible storehouse of our reconciliation, which never fails, for it is greater than all the debts of the world. This is that immeasurable love, which is higher than the heavens, for it has repaired the ruin of the angels; deeper than hell, for it has freed souls from hell; wider and broader than the earth, for it is without end and incomprehensible by any created understanding.

O how keen and intense was this thirst of our Lord! For not only did He then say once, "I thirst," but even now He says in our hearts continually, "I thirst; woman, give me to drink." So great, so mighty, is that thirst, that He asks drink not only from the children of Israel, but from the Samaritans. To each one He complaineth of His thirst. But for what dost Thou thirst, O good Jesus? "My meat and drink," saith He, "is that men should do My Father's will. Now this is the will of My Father, even your sanctification and salvation, that you may sanctify your souls by walking in My precepts, by doing works of repentance, by adorning yourselves with all virtues, in order that, like a bride adorned for her husband, you may be worthy to be present at My supper in My Father's kingdom, and to sleep with Me as My elect bride, in the chamber of My Father's heart."

O how Christ longs to bring all men thither! This is the meaning of His words: "Where I am there shall also My servant be"; and again: "Father, I will that they may be one even as We are one." O, how incomprehensible is this thirst of Christ! What toil and labour He endured for thirty and three years, for the sake of it! For this His very heart's blood was poured out. See what our tender Lord says to His Father: "The zeal of Thine house hath even eaten Me." Truly, He would have submitted to be crucified a thousand times, rather than allow one soul to perish through any fault of His.

O how this inward thirst tormented Him, when He thought that He had done all that He could, and even a hundredfold more than He need have done, and yet that so few had turned to Him, and been won by Him. His whole body was now worn out; all His blood was shed; nothing remained for Him to do; and therefore He was constrained to confess, "It is finished"; and yet by all His labours, afflictions, and sufferings, He had brought no richer harvest to the Father than this. Truly, this was the most bitter of all His sorrows, that after so hard a battle His victory had not been more glorious, and that He returned a conqueror to His Father with so few spoils.

Therefore, all those who do not refresh Him by performing His will, and doing all that is pleasing and honourable to Him, and withstanding all that reason tells them to be displeasing to Him, will one day hear Him say, "I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink. Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

Fourthly, there is yet another inward meaning of this word--namely, that Christ spoke it out of the love which inwardly draws Him towards all men, thus making known to us His ardent love, and opening His own heart, as a delightful couch, on which we may feed pleasantly, and inviting us to it, saying, "I thirst for you." For as the liquid which we drink is sent down pleasantly through the throat into the body, and so passes into the substance and nature of our body, so Christ out of the ardent thirst of His love, takes spiritual pleasure in drinking in all men into Himself, swallowing them, as it were, and incorporating them into Himself, and bringing them into the secret chamber of His loving heart. Therefore He says: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me"--all men, that is, who allow themselves to be drawn by Me, and submit to Me as obedient instruments, suffering Me to do with them according to My gracious will. But those who resist Him quench not His thirst, but give Him a bitter draught instead, even the deeds of their own self-will. These, when our Lord tasteth them, He straightway rejects.

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